



Request for City Council Committee Action from the Department of Transportation & Public Works

Date: May 13th, 2014

To: Honorable Kevin Reich, Chair Transportation and Public Works Committee

Subject: **Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for
the Blue Line LRT Extension (Bottineau Corridor LRT)**

Recommendation:

Approve the proposed comments on the DEIS for the Blue Line LRT Extension (Bottineau Corridor) and direct the Public Works Department to submit the comments to Hennepin County.

Previous Directives:

- September 22, 2009 – T&PW Committee Receive and File presentation on the Bottineau Transitway Alternatives Analysis Study.
- February 14, 2012 – T&PW Committee received and filed presentation by Hennepin County on the Bottineau Transitway Draft Environmental Impact Statement process.
- February 15, 2012 – City Council Resolution to accept the invitation to become a participating agency for the Bottineau Transitway Draft Environmental Impact Statement process.
- February 15, 2012 – City Council Resolution to approve and submit comments on the scope of issues to be studied in the Bottineau Transitway Draft Environmental Impact Statement.
- February 15, 2012 – City Council Resolution to endorse the D1 alignment for the Bottineau Transitway, subject to an executed Memorandum of Understanding with Hennepin County and Metro Transit to pursue an arterial transitway project and transit-oriented development initiatives in North Minneapolis, separate from the Bottineau Transitway project.

Department Information

Prepared by: Donald Pflaum, P.E., PTOE, Public Works Transportation Planner 673-2129 and Jim Voll, CPED Principal City Planner 673-3887

Approved by: Steven A. Kotke, P.E., City Engineer, Director of Public Works

Presenters in Committee: Brent Rusco, P.E., Bottineau Transitway Project Manager, Hennepin County and Donald Pflaum, Transportation Planner 673-2129

Financial Impact

- No financial impact

Supporting Information

The 13-mile Blue Line LRT Extension (Bottineau Corridor) is a regional light-rail transit corridor that serves Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park (Attachment #1). This line will directly connect to the Green Line (Central Corridor), to the Green Line Extension (Southwest Corridor), and to the Northstar Commuter Rail Line in Downtown Minneapolis. Arterial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) connections to the Bottineau Corridor are planned for the Penn Avenue North Corridor in addition to the Emerson/Fremont Avenue North Corridors. A transit study along West Broadway (with possible connections to the Bottineau Corridor) is also underway. The Bottineau LRT project is expected to serve an estimated 27,000 riders per weekday and is proposed to have up to 11 new stations, including 2 new stations in Minneapolis. The project will interline with the Hiawatha Corridor LRT, allowing for a one-seat ride between Brooklyn Park, Downtown Minneapolis, and the Mall of America.

The Blue Line LRT Extension has been estimated to cost \$1 billion in 2017 dollars. Hennepin County will prepare an application to the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program to secure 50% of the project budget. Ten percent of the project budget is expected from the State of Minnesota, 10% from the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA), and 30% from the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB).

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) documents the potential social, economic, and environmental benefits and impacts of a proposed project or action and proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The DEIS is released to the public and interested agencies for review and comment. The DEIS and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) comprise the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under NEPA. Completing an Environmental Impact Statement is a significant milestone in the Federal Transit Administration's process for securing federal New Starts funding. Previously Hennepin County completed a Feasibility Study, an Alternatives Analysis, and a Scoping Document for the Bottineau Corridor. Hennepin County prepared the DEIS and the Metropolitan Council will complete the NEPA process.

The Alternatives Analysis resulted in the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), which was approved by the City of Minneapolis on February 15, 2012. The Metropolitan Council amended the region's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) to include light rail transit (LRT) as the mode of choice for the corridor and selected the locally preferred alternative (LPA) route along West Broadway Avenue in Brooklyn Park, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad corridor in Crystal, Robbinsdale, and Golden Valley, and Olson Memorial Highway (Trunk Highway 55) in Minneapolis (called the B-C-D1 Alignment) on May 8, 2013. The February 15, 2012 LPA resolution also included the following language:

"Be It Further Resolved that the City of Minneapolis commits to working with Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council to pursue enhanced transit service, economic development and livability in North Minneapolis, including a West Broadway Alternatives Analysis, evaluation of rapid bus improvements for the Emerson Avenue North/Fremont Avenue North and the Penn Avenue North corridors, development of the mixed income/mixed use project at Penn and West Broadway with enhanced transit facilities, the creation of a Community Works project for Penn Avenue North, and feeder bus network improvements connecting North and Northeast Minneapolis with the Bottineau Transitway."

Additional Transit Studies designed to find ways to improve connectivity to and through North Minneapolis

It should be noted that since the LPA resolution passed, several additional transit studies have been initiated. These studies are designed to find ways to improve connectivity to and through North Minneapolis. The City of Minneapolis has been working with both Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council:

- To advance arterial BRT in North Minneapolis along the Penn corridor.
- To advance arterial BRT in North Minneapolis along the Emerson/Fremont corridor.
- Hennepin Community Works Project has advanced for the Penn Avenue North corridor.
- A transit study has been commissioned for the West Broadway corridor.

It is important that the efforts and past commitments continue to be supported and progress to provide improved transit access, economic development, and livability. The City of Minneapolis comments on the DEIS assume these commitments and efforts will continue and will result in actions and projects that meet the stated goals.

Station area planning activities

Station area planning will evaluate and recommend the most appropriate form and type of transit oriented development for the area surrounding transit stations. This may result in amended land use policy and maps with the adoption of the station area plans. Changes are most likely to occur at larger vacant parcels and underutilized properties near the Van White station and at the Highway 55/ Penn Avenue station. The Highway 55 corridor should be explored in conjunction with strategies for narrowing Hwy 55.

DEIS Details

The DEIS was published on April 11, 2014. The public comment period ends May 29, 2014. Public testimony will be taken at public hearings held on the following dates:

Wednesday, May 7, 2014
Golden Valley City Hall
6:00 – 7:00 PM Public Open House
7:00 PM Formal Public Hearing

Thursday, May 8, 2014
University of Minnesota Urban Research and
Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC)
4:30 – 5:30 PM Public Open House
5:30 PM Formal Public Hearing

Tuesday, May 13, 2014
Brooklyn Park City Hall
4:30 – 5:30 PM Public Open House
5:30 PM Formal Public Hearing

Wednesday, May 14, 2014
Crystal Community Center
5:00 – 6:00 PM Public Open House
6:00 PM Formal Public Hearing

The public may also submit written comments to the following address:

Hennepin County
Housing, Community Works & Transit

701 Fourth Avenue South, Suite 400
Minneapolis, MN 55415
bottineau@co.hennepin.mn.us

The DEIS is organized into the following chapters in addition to the Executive Summary:

- 1) Purpose and Need
- 2) Alternatives
- 3) Transportation Analysis
- 4) Community and Social Analysis
- 5) Physical and Environmental Analysis
- 6) Indirect Effects and Cumulative Impacts
- 7) Environmental Justice
- 8) Draft Section (4F) Evaluation
- 9) Consultation and Coordination
- 10) Financial Considerations
- 11) Evaluation of Alternatives

Technical appendices A-I supplement the 11 chapters above.

Comments

For simplicity, CPED and Public Works have organized comments by major topic. The key comments CPED and Public Works have made on this document include general comments and general technical comments. All City of Minneapolis DEIS comments, including detailed technical comments can be found in Attachment #2.

Overall Comments:

- 1) The City of Minneapolis supports the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) route.
- 2) The City of Minneapolis supports the purpose and need for this project.

The Purpose and Need section of the DEIS accurately describes the reasons why the Bottineau Transitway is needed, including:

- (a) The need to provide a higher level of transportation service to North Minneapolis, especially for those who do not have a car.
- (b) The need to provide greater connectivity to and between North Minneapolis and the rest of the region. This line will increase and expand the connectivity between residents and employment opportunities.
- (c) The need to accommodate future population growth (to meet the Metropolitan Council's population projections), to increase new jobs and access to existing jobs, and to strengthen neighborhoods.

General Technical Comments:

- 1) Two local north/south streets that currently have median openings on Olson Highway are proposed to be closed, thereby limiting vehicular access to right-in/right-out movement (Russell Avenue North and Elmwood Avenue North). Bicycle and pedestrian crossings must be maintained through the alignment, across LRT tracks and Olson at both intersections.
- 2) Bicycle and pedestrian crossings exist at four additional locations in alignment with streets that do not currently include a vehicle median break (but do have sidewalks) along Olson Highway (Queen Avenue North, Sheridan Avenue North, Newton Avenue North, and Logan Avenue North). Bicycle and pedestrian crossings must be maintained through the alignment, across LRT tracks and Olson at all four intersections.
- 3) Diverted vehicular traffic must be accommodated in a manner that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood context.
- 4) The City of Minneapolis is opposed to the placement of the Operations and Maintenance Facility for this line within the City of Minneapolis.

- 5) Both stations within the corporate boundaries of Minneapolis (Penn and Van White) must be constructed.
- 6) Construction of both the Golden Valley Road Station and the Plymouth Avenue Station is necessary to adequately serve the corridor travelshed, including a significant portion of North Minneapolis. Though these stations are located outside of Minneapolis corporate boundaries, they are located close enough to ensure improved access to the regional fixed rail system for residents in North Minneapolis, and will improve ridership.
- 7) Conduct additional studies to ensure the narrowing of Olson Highway so that the combination of street and LRT line will help to catalyze a denser, more urban development pattern within the corridor; one that will ensure that new development along the line is truly transit-oriented, rather than highway-oriented. The existing highway environment needs to be redesigned and modified in order to provide greater balance. Specifically, the roadway needs to be designed to accommodate the necessary vehicular traffic while also accommodating and enhancing connectivity between transit, pedestrian, and bicycle networks. The project office will need to work on this critical topic with Hennepin County Community Works and the City of Minneapolis as station area planning progresses.
- 8) Specific ridership (not a range) at individual stations must be determined (both boarding and alighting). Further work is needed to determine pedestrian capacity and infrastructure improvements at the Downtown Minneapolis stations given that the Bottineau Corridor will be the fourth LRT line to run along the high-volume 5th Street corridor.
- 9) Safety and security at station locations and routes to/from stations is critical. It is recommended that measures such as (but not limited to) surveillance cameras and street lighting (per the City of Minneapolis street lighting policy) be installed and that station design allows for visibility at stations.
- 10) The City of Minneapolis requires that local stormwater policies and ordinances be adhered to. Stormwater management, wetland and flood plain mitigation must consider not only the specific area of impact, but broader impacts on the local area and regional system.
- 11) The City of Minneapolis does not support park-and-ride facilities within City limits. Vacant lots near the proposed Van White Station are needed for Transit Oriented Development, which will help improve density and ridership at that station.
- 12) Traction power substations and signal bungalows must be appropriately placed and the visual impact mitigated. Traction Power Substations should be appropriate for the community context, should be landscaped, should be fenced for safety, and should be designed with architectural fencing instead of chain link fence.
- 13) Utilities and street infrastructure disrupted as part of the project must be replaced at the project's expense.
- 14) Noise and vibration from the LRT operations must be mitigated.
- 15) The City of Minneapolis is opposed to LRT pre-emption at signalized crossings.
- 16) The City of Minneapolis supports efforts to minimize project impacts on identified historical or cultural resources.
- 17) The project must minimize tree loss; salvage trees where possible and replace trees per the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board urban tree policy. Boulevard design should be consistent with the Minneapolis Design Guidelines for Streets and Sidewalks.
- 18) Public art must be integrated into station design.
- 19) Pedestrian Level Street Lighting should be evaluated in accordance with the City of Minneapolis Street Lighting Policy. Traffic impacts to the Olson Highway/I-94 Bridge need to be mitigated. Any ornamental railings and artwork must be salvaged.
- 20) Catenary poles along Olson Highway should reflect the same style used along University Avenue (painted tapered tubular design).
- 21) Embedded track should be constructed along the entire length of Olson Highway.
- 22) Best practices for mitigating the construction impacts for local businesses should be implemented.

23) Traffic impacts along the corridor need to be mitigated, especially traffic impacts to the Olson Highway/I-94 Bridge, the segment east of I-94 into the Interchange, and the at-grade crossing at 7th Street and Olson Highway.

The general technical comments above and the detailed technical comments found in attachment #2 will help mitigate the impacts of the project and will better serve the needs of Minneapolis.

Project Challenges

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) is the current federal transportation act that governs transportation spending that was signed into law in July 2012. MAP-21 policy set new timelines for completing transit projects using federal funding. The following statements, taken from the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) website, point out that there are deadlines to meet in order for a transit project to qualify for federal funding.

- New Starts and Core Capacity projects are required by law to complete the Project Development phase within two years of entering that phase. While the law provides for an extension to the two year timeframe, this is expected to be the rare exception rather than the rule. Thus, FTA advises project sponsors to do "up front" work in advance of seeking entry into Project Development to ensure they can complete the Project Development activities within two years.
- Within three years of granting approval to enter the Engineering phase, FTA expects New Starts and Core Capacity project sponsors to have made sufficient progress on their projects including obtaining funding commitments for at least half of the non-Section 5309 funding.

While this is not a comprehensive list, the following tasks are likely to be challenging given the constrained timelines outlined above:

- a. To secure railroad right-of-way (ROW) agreements
- b. To secure overhead power lines agreements where poles must be relocated.
- c. To minimize and mitigate potential 4F parkland impacts including noise, vibration, visual impacts, and potential historical impacts.
- d. To minimize and mitigate wetland impacts along the BNSF corridor.
- e. Securing local match funding.

It is important for all agencies involved with this project to work cooperatively to address these challenges in a timely manner.

Next Steps

Hennepin County is currently the responsible governmental unit for the DEIS work for this project. Upon completion of the DEIS process, Hennepin County will transfer the project to the Metropolitan Council for the preliminary engineering (PE) and construction phases of this project. By the end of 2014, the Metropolitan Council will create a Bottineau Project Office and hire consultants to complete the preliminary engineering plans. A Corridor Management Committee will be established in late 2014. PE work will take place in 2015 and 2016. The Metropolitan Council will also be responsible for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and for the Record of Decision (ROD). The FEIS will address environmental impacts at a higher level of detail and will identify mitigation activities.

By statute, a municipal consent process will be used to establish the final project scope at approximately 30% engineering plans. It is expected that the municipal consent process will likely take place in 2016.

Once the PE process has been completed and local funding secured, the Federal Transit Administration will enter into a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) with the Metropolitan Council (expected in 2018) and construction will begin (expected to start in 2018 and conclude in 2021).

Attachment 1 – Bottineau Corridor Map

Attachment 2 – DEIS Comments

Attachment 3 – Hennepin County Presentation

Attachment 4 – City of Minneapolis Public Works Presentation